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SUBJECT: SERBIA: VISA LIBERALIZATION MAY BE PRESSURE POINT
FOR PROGRESS ON KOSOVO

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Classified By: Bradford Bell, Deputy Political Chief; reasons 1.4 (b, d
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Summary

1. (C) The Government of Serbia,s overwhelming desire to secure visa liberalization with the EU is a pressure point that could facilitate Serbia,s cooperation on Kosovo issues. According to EU Special Representative in Belgrade Sorensen, the GoS had lost its footing on Kosovo as a result of the EU,s recent tough line on visa liberalization standards. The GoS is now concerned that unless it is able to show that Serbia is cooperating fully with the EU Rule of Law Mission (EULEX), its goal of visa free travel to the EU may be jeopardized. Serbia now seems to be scrambling to be cooperative, and is close to signing an MOU on police cooperation with EULEX, from which other substantive cooperation could flow. In addition, internal Kosovo Ministry squabbling is further weakening Serbia's negotiating position with EULEX. Foreign Minister Jeremic, while still pushing his international agenda on Kosovo, appears sidelined on internal Kosovo issues. This may present an opportunity for progress in Kosovo on police and customs. That trickle of progress could lead to more cooperation, if the EU is able to keep its finger on the right pressure point * Serbia,s access to the EU. End Summary.

Visas: Serbia,s Incentive to Cooperate with EULEX

2. (C) Not wanting to jeopardize its goal of visa free travel to the EU by the end of 2009, the GoS is looking to cooperate substantively with EULEX. On June 8, Serbia,s Ministry of Interior presented to EULEX a draft MOU which would facilitate cooperation between the GoS and EULEX on police, customs and intelligence sharing. EUSR Peter Sorensen told us on June 10 that Serbia,s push for this MOU began in earnest once it realized that without full cooperation, EULEX would have to report to Brussels that Serbia was unable to guarantee the security of its border (which Serbia still considers a boundary line), an important precondition for Schengen "White List" status and visa free travel. He expected that EULEX would be able to accept the MOU with minor changes.

Possible Progress in Police and Customs

3. (C) Sorensen said he expected that once implemented the MOU could lead to substantive coordination between EULEX and the GoS on the ground. The MOU would facilitate the sharing of intelligence information regarding customs and border activity. According to Sorensen, customs points in the North (Gate 1 and 31) would need to be fully operational and EULEX

police would need to have a more robust presence in North Kosovo in order for Serbia to fulfill its obligations under the MOU.

Dacic Cooperative, Bogdanovic to an Extent

¶4. (C) Sorensen said the Interior Ministry (MOI), led by Ivica Dacic, appeared willing to cooperate with EULEX and had appointed Serbia's Deputy Police Commander as EULEX's MOI point of contact. (Per reftel A, Interior Minister Ivica Dacic of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) has strongly tied himself to the goal of obtaining Schengen White List status for Serbia, which involves sorting out the thorny issue of the issuance of Serbian passports to residents of Kosovo. Dacic has a strong incentive to cooperate with EULEX, in part hoping to gain EU flexibility on the passport issue.) Kosovo Minister Goran Bogdanovic was also playing a more constructive role out of concern not to be blamed for losing Serbia's chance at White List status, Sorensen said. This concern spurred Bogdanovic to take action in May against a train which was carrying illicit fuel from Serbia into Kosovo. Bogdanovic's definitive action against the train smugglers lead to threats against his family who still live in Kosovo, Bogdanovic's chief of staff Vlada Jovicic told us on June 4. Sorensen readily admitted that Bogdanovic still remained uncooperative in other areas, such as his insistence on traveling officially to Kosovo and his June 3 statements to parliamentarians that the GoS had not agreed to EULEX's partial return to customs posts in northern Kosovo. EULEX sources, who have apprised us of their ongoing talks with the Kosovo Ministry on this issue, say that there was mutual agreement between EULEX and the GoS on the customs issue.

Jeremic Absent from Issue

¶5. (C) Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic appears to have removed himself from internal Kosovo issues, choosing instead to travel the globe beating his anti-Kosovo recognition drum and harping on Serbia's International Court of Justice strategy.

In the interim, Jeremic has left internal Kosovo issues to his advisor Damjan Krnjovic-Miskovic, who appears to be coordinating with Bogdanovic to make certain EULEX cooperation moves ahead. Sorensen also said he received on June 9 a commitment from Krnjovic-Miskovic that UNMIK no longer needed to be present in EULEX and GoS meetings. Jovicic told us on June 4 that the Kosovo Ministry had no concerns about meeting alone with EULEX) as they had done in the past. Sorensen was optimistic that this would give EULEX greater freedom to deal with the Serbian ministries directly responsible for cooperation with EULEX, particularly Interior and Justice.

Progress on Police, Customs, Then What?

¶6. (C) After securing greater cooperation on police and customs through the MOU, judiciary would be the next area for progress, but Sorensen was more sober and pragmatic on what could be accomplished in that regard. Without a clear understanding of the applicable law issue (whose law to apply: Kosovo, UNMIK, or Serbian) it would be difficult to move beyond removing the administrative backlog of cases in Mitrovica. Looking even further down the field, Sorensen did not see what incentive Serbia would have to cooperate on other pending issues, such as decentralization or local elections, which are scheduled for later this year. Bogdanovic, however, realized Serbia must engage on decentralization or the GoS could be further marginalized in Kosovo, Sorensen said. Bogdanovic remained unwilling or unable to meet with International Civilian Representative Feith, Sorensen said.

Kosovo Ministry: Internal Divisions

¶7. (C) Internal divisions within the Kosovo Ministry have also caused Serbia to lose its footing on Kosovo. Jovicic told us that the divide between Minister Bogdanovic and State Secretary Oliver Ivanovic continued to grow. Ivanovic was making things difficult both within the Ministry and between Serbia and the international community, Jovicic said. Ivanovic,s frequent off the cuff remarks to the media had eroded support from the international community, he added. Jovicic admitted that the Ministry had little control over Ivanovic, saying he did not know "what exactly Ivanovic was up to." Sorensen said Ivanovic,s recent decision to politically align himself with Nebojsa Covic of the newly-resurrected Social Democratic Party had further isolated Ivanovic, making DS and SPS the powerbrokers in the Kosovo Ministry. Sorensen believed these mixed signals from Belgrade could work to the advantage of institutions in Kosovo, if Kosovo Serbs get sick of looking to the MoK for guidance and chose instead to engage directly with the Pristina government or the International Civilian Office.

Comment

¶8. (C) Although Sorensen,s optimism may be premature, it appears the EU may have found the right pressure point to obtain greater cooperation from Serbia on Kosovo issues. The GoS,s willingness to conclude this MOU, particularly Dacic's interest, is an indication that Serbia,s political leaders may now fear the inability to deliver visa free travel to Serbian citizens more than they fear appearing "soft" on the Kosovo issue. The EU may have finally seized upon a useful carrot and stick, but even this tool has a limited lifespan. Serbia will expect to be rewarded for its cooperation, and will be bitterly disappointed if its flexibility on issues such as police cooperation with EULEX does not lead to flexibility from the EU on concerns about passport issuance. Lack of success on the visa issue, a gut issue for many Serbs, will leave the "For Europe" coalition, headed by President Tadic, with little to show on progress toward European integration. Tadic,s main political rival Tome Nikolic, head of the Serbian Progressive Party (which broke from the Radicals last year), already has told us this "failure" will be his main campaign issue as he calls for new elections. End Comment.

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